DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 801 JC 900 390

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TITLE Chairpersons as Promoters of Community Service.
INSTITUTION Catonsville Community Coll., Md.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; *College Role; Community Colleges; Community Influence; Community Programs; *Department Heads; Financial Services; Legal Aid; Program Descriptions; *School Community Relationship; *School Involvement; Social Responsibility; Student Volunteers; Two Year Colleges; *Volunteers

ABSTRACT

Discussions about the social responsibility of businesses have led to questions about the social responsibility of academic institutions. As governmental support of community activities appears to be lessening, activities by educational institutions in support of local communities becomes more essential. New developments in the linkage between school and community have required departmental and divisional chairpersons to take the proactive step of promoting community service. At Catonsville Community College (CCC), one of the most visible community programs is the Volunteers in Tax Assistance (VITA) program, in which accounting students and the accounting faculty give assistance to elderly, low-income, and handicapped citizens in preparing their tax returns. The VITA program allows CCC students and faculty to reach out into the community to help residents in an area of great need. And while the college is helping those who need assistance, the mission and faculty of the college become better known to the community. Another community outreach program at CCC is the Volunteers in Legal Assistance (VILA) program. Similar to the VITA program, the VILA program involves law faculty in diagnosing legal problems for community residents and referring such individuals to competent legal professionals who can provide the assistance needed. A third program, VIFA (Volunteers in Financial Assistance), provides referral service to community members who need financial advice. The role of the departmental or division chairperson in promoting the myriad of services to the community is to create an environment that supports creativity and community involvement. Chairs should recognize faculty who participate by nominating them for service awards and by sponsoring them for attendance at conferences and workshops. As colleges meet more or their community responsibilities, the community expands its own interest in their programs and in using their services. (JMC)

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Chairpersons as Promoters of Community Service

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CHAIRPERSONS AS PROMOTERS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

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A commonly accepted list of functions of departmental and division chairpersons usually includes the following:

Leader	Advisor	Representor	Arbitrator
Coordinator	Planner	Negotiator	Appeaser
Delegator	Evaluator	Manager	Cheerleader

(Alexander & Cowan, 1986).

The functions are also commonly regarded as restricted to leadership traits in the management of human and non-human resources on campus. This attitude, however, is beginning to change in unexpected directions as society pleads for a meeting of the minds and hearts between town and gown.

Educational institutions are being asked to be more accommodating to the needs of residents of their local communities and, in particular, to be more active in community development (Andrews, 1989; Mora & Giovannini, 1989). In light of this new requirement of the linkage between school and community, the chair of a department or a division should take the proactive step of promoting community service in the performance of the cited functions above. In essence, discussions about the

"social responsibility" of business have led to questions' being asked about the "social responsibility" of academic institutions (Cavan, 1989; Keim, 1989).

Government support of community activities appears to be lessening. However, activities in support of local communities are so essential that educational institutions must become more involved if community development is not to be adversely affected. The attractions and conveniences offered by educational institutions in sustaining and even expanding community services are so numerous and so valuable that acceptance by the community is virtually assured when local residents have been made aware of them. Community colleges offer a wide range of activities from transfer and career programs to degree and certificate programs and non-credit programs, all co-existing in a single organizational entity.

Despite some attempt by most institutions to differentiate their programs from one another, most offerings are essentially alike. Some departments or divisions may be more successful at promoting their programs' convenience and quality, but all departments and divisions offer substantially the same services. To use a technical term in economics, academic programs are monopolistically competitive. The distinguishing features may well lie in ensuring that the public is fully aware of this quality, convenience, and variety and how well the various programs meet manifest needs. In other words, the surrounding community must be made aware of an

institution's commitment to social responsibility and the offerings that meet these responsibilities. Social responsibility involves an awareness by the college of the effect it can have on the local community through its services and programs.

A college cannot, of course, remove pollution or make charitable contributions as can a private corporation, but a college can involve itself deeply in community affairs (Fetchen, Heimer & Kay, 1989; Mulder, 1989; Moebius, 1989). For example, at Catonsville Community College, one of the most visible community programs that has been instituted is the VITA (Volunteers in Tax Assistance) program. Accounting students and every member of the accounting faculty participate in a program giving assistance to the elderly, low-income and handicapped citizens in preparing their tax returns. The IRS supports the program with useful materials and training. The VITA program has been enthusiastically received by the community. Approximately 800 senior citizens have benefited from the VITA program since its inception in 1977.

The VITA Program allows C.C.C. students and faculty alike to reach out into the community to help residents in a matter of great need. While the College is helping those who need the tax preparation assistance, the mission and faculty of the College become better known to the community.

Another community outreach program is the VILA (Volunteers in Legal Assistance) program. Catonsville Community College Law faculty do not legally represent those who need legal help, but they to tell them where to find the best in legal assistance. Few people, especially the elderly and poor, are sufficiently versed in the law to diagnose their problems and seek appropriate legal relief or help. Law faculty provide a diagnosis of legal problems and refer persons to the precise individuals in the legal profession who can provide the assistance needed. In so doing, the College's presence in the community becomes more visible, and the word-of-mouth and goodwill which results spreads to attract those who might not otherwise be tempted to sample the College's offerings.

A third program, VIFA (Volunteers in Financial Assistance), provides referral service to those persons in the community who need financial advice. Knowledgeable members of the faculty analyze the financial problems being experienced by community residents and refer the individuals to competent professionals able to deal with these problems.

Activities of a more general developmental nature can also be conducted by members of the faculty in less technical areas. Many local residents, through age or other infirmities are not able to travel to the campus and seek out the various types of assistance available. Members of the faculty should be encouraged to go into

senior citizen centers to read poems and stories, engage in simple conversations, and run art classes for them. By engaging in this type of activity which literally reaches out into private lives of senior citizens, the College makes a further contribution to the community in the area of social responsibility. In some instances, the age and other physical limitations of senior citizens prevent them from being able to perform certain tasks. Faculty members can volunteer to write letters and complete certain legal documents for members of the community. Proactive faculty involvement in Community professional and civic organizations is another way of providing campus expertise to residents of the college community.

The role of the Chair in promoting the myriad of services to the community is to create an environment that supports creativity and community commitment. Chairs should recognize faculty who participate in community activities by nominating them for internal and external service awards, sponsoring them for attendance at local or national seminars, workshops and conferences, and giving them extra increments for going the second-mile for the college and the community. The manifestation of Division Chair involvement in the provision of community services is another way of demonstrating leadership and motivating faculty to participate.

The advantages of participating in community service and activities such as these to any college are important. The College becomes more visible and emphasizes its

presence. The helpful nature of these activities further serves as a source of community goodwill and encourages acceptance of the colleges' programs. Educational institutions can no longer stand apart from the community. As colleges meet more of their community responsibilities, the community expands its own interest in their programs and in using their services. In particular, colleges need to demonstrate convincingly how they can enrich the lives of residents through cultural enhancement.

A great deal of misunderstanding surrounds the conventional concepts of the relationships which should exist between school and community. Academic divisions can do much more than simply educate; they can enrich the life experience of everyone they are able to reach. Perhaps the most significant service they can perform is to dispel the perception that town and gown should not meet. School and residents inhabit the same space and can contribute to the advancement of each other.

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